FOR PARTICIPANTS ONLY

UNESCO/SS/CONF.URB/W/20
ECAFE/URB/20
17 August 1956

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE FAR EAST
AND
UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

JOINT UN/UNESCO SEMINAR ON URBANIZATION IN THE ECAFE REGION

Jointly sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Bureau of Social Affairs and the Secretariat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, in co-operation with the International Labour Office

8-18 August 1956
Bangkok, Thailand

RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY REPORT - ITEM 4(3)
POLICIES FOR TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

Prepared by Mr. Ernest Weissmann
Assistant Director, UN Bureau of Social Affairs

1. The subject was introduced by the rapporteur who discussed (a) the relationship between urbanization and the physical environment; (b) the role of housing, building and community improvement in the process of urbanization; (c) physical or environmental planning; and (d) the regional planning approach as a means to guide urbanization.

Urbanization and physical environment

2. Asian cities are attracting large numbers of rural people. The drift away from the village is due to the growing pressure of people on food producing land, to a change from a predominantly peasant economy to modern industrialized production, and to the more intimate contact of the developing

/areas with

areas with the expanding world market. In recent years the pace of this process of urbanization has become rapid and congestion and blight are rampant in many cities, while at the same time the rural environment continues to deteriorate and the gap between urban and rural living is becoming wider. The urbanization process is particularly intensive in the countries which have recently gained independence; whose economies have changed from colonial to national economies and where the net increase in the population is mainly reflected in a phenomenal growth of cities.

3. With the development of trade through better transport and communications of a wider range and capacity, the urban/rural balance of a particular region tends to become increasingly influenced by the demographic, economic, social, cultural and political factors outside that region. The world-wide requirements of production, consumption and trade are thus becoming more important elements in economic development, industrialization and urbanization everywhere. Great changes may also occur in the pace of industrialization and the urban/rural relationship in the developing areas as a result of the technological advances which can be expected from the development of modern industry and agriculture, automation and nuclear energy.

4. The deterioration of the urban environment and the problem of housing in Asia are perhaps worse than in other parts of the world. The process of urbanization here, which was once characterized by a slow and gradual change, is now becoming increasingly rapid, massive, intensive and pregnant with social problems. Its symptoms are social maladjustment and drastic physical change leaving often in its wake slums and environmental blight. Programmes designed to prevent or to repair the ills connected with an explosive expansion of cities are being hampered by lack of investment funds and frustrated by the fast growing population and the migration to cities. Approaches, methods and techniques are being sought to cope more effectively with the rapid change in the settlement pattern and to achieve a more balanced development through planned location and growth of industry in relation to the other fields of production. Physical planning in step with economic and social programmes has consequently become an essential factor influencing balanced development.

/Housing,

Housing, Community Improvement and Building

5. The improvement of man's physical environment is a visible expression of a rise in living conditions. It is composed of the family shelter and its environment including a number of amenities, services and facilities which provide the link between the family and the group, and help to transform a "house" into a family home within a community. The problem of providing better housing and communities has assumed staggering proportions under the impact of industrialization and rapid urbanization. The intensity of the housing crisis and the expansion of urban and rural slums suggest the need for bold and imaginative action. The limitation of investment capital, however, and the keen competition for available funds call for economy to meet enormous needs with small outlays.

6. Governments are assuming increasing responsibility for the financing of housing and community improvement programmes as part of their general social and economic policy. Practical action by central as well as by local authorities in a significant number of countries is being geared to their economic possibilities and general development programmes. As a result resources in materials, plant, manpower and funds that can be made available for current and future housing programmes are being assessed in the light of their contribution to full employment and social betterment, to economic growth and better living conditions.

7. Housing and community facilities, together with education and health, belong to the category of so-called "social overhead" projects. They are beginning to be considered as basic to economic development. In this respect they can be compared to the "economic overhead" projects such as transport, communications and power, which are generally accepted to be requisite for effective economic development. These overhead projects provide little or no yield in foreign exchange. They generally furnish low yields and take a considerable time to realize any yields in financial terms. Their benefits, however, are derived from the more balanced development of economic activities which utilize them.

/8. It is

8. It is now being recognized that provision of adequate housing and community facilities must accompany, or even precede, resource development if serious obstacles to economic progress and the high social costs of haphazard urbanization are to be avoided. There appears, however, to be a considerable area of conflict in the sphere of national policy formulation in the developing countries, between the "economic" and the "social" approach. The housing enthusiast seeks prompt fulfilment of housing needs without appreciation of the difficulty of supplying the resources required. The development enthusiast, however, sees the problem of economic development in terms of scarce capital resources which should be diverted to "more productive tasks".

9. The relation of housing finance to economic development involves examination of many complex problems such as the share of investment funds which the countries can and should allot to housing and community improvement programmes in the interest of balanced economic growth and stability. It also calls for the establishment of priorities among the different social programmes including housing and community facilities. Housing, furthermore, is deeply involved in the process of saving and investment. It is a type of capital formation that both encourages and strengthens long-term patterns of saving. People will save for better housing who would not make their savings automatically available for capital formation otherwise. As the shortage of savings is a severe obstacle to economic growth in the developing countries, this additional mobilization through house building may be an important contribution.

10. In connection with housing and community facilities for people in the lower income groups it is most important to foster and improve the production of local building materials, both as cottage industries and on a larger scale. In order to reduce the cost of urban housing and to improve its quality in and around large agglomerations experiencing intensive shortages, highly productive building and building materials industries on a sufficiently large scale are necessary to cope with the required volume at costs attainable. This is essential also for the general economic development since a large share of capital investment funds goes into structures of different kinds.

/11. At the same

11. At the same time it must be considered that housing programmes cannot mature successfully unless the house-types adopted - both in regard to construction and accommodation - are related to the economic, social and physical conditions of a country, or a given area. Variations in house-types between countries, and also within a country, are to be expected. House-types, furthermore, are not likely to be static, but will depend on social and economic advancement. Housing codes should, therefore, provide for such changes and should aim at establishing guiding principles, and the standards of performance required from a dwelling to be healthy, safe and convenient, rather than at fixing specific sizes or construction methods.

12. Housing standards cannot be separated from the corresponding standards for utilities social services and community facilities, including in urban areas, transport between residence and the place of work. When resources are scarce, greater emphasis should be laid on adequate community and regional planning, and on the provision of utilities, services and facilities, rather than on a limited number of well equipped houses in a pour environment.

13. No government has sufficient resources to provide all the housing and community facilities needed; the people may have them. Practical solutions should therefore combine their skills and resourcefulness; the rational application of local materials; the social advantages of group work; and the best use of assistance from public authority in funds or materials, in equipment, and in technical advice. The community development process could thus be effectively used for the improvement of home and community. Projects of such obvious and direct benefit to individual and group - through self-help and mutual aid - have often become focal points for local action which has usually extended into other fields of improvement as well.

14. The studies prepared for the seminar and the discussions during the seminar itself have clearly indicated that the "push" away from the village and the "pull" towards the city are together responsible for the current rise in internal migration. Some additional movement from country to town is a result of social and political changes during and after the Second World War. Thus the dominant motivations for the drift to the city are economic. They are a social by-product of demographic growth and economic change. It would of course

be idle to pretend that this desire for improvement of one's condition of life can be arrested or turned back. The question therefore is how can nations adjust their planning and turn this population drive into a positive contribution to social and economic development.

15. Better housing, social and cultural amenities and more adequate community facilities in rural areas especially may help to slow down the drift and reduce the city's psychological impact in rural people. Bringing industry into the rural areas, both small and large, could do even better. Location of industry within existing clusters of villages might bring to the rural population direct benefits from a new source of livelihood injected into the area. The usual drift to the immediate vicinity of the production centre might possibly be reduced and fewer village people might have to be transplanted into entirely different urban environments. The process of urbanization could then take a more positive form and bring more of the benefits of industrialization into the rural area - higher family incomes; better community facilities; more desirable community environment, thus combining the advantages of rural living and industrial employment. In this way perhaps a more desirable mix between central planning and individual and group initiative could be also achieved.

Physical or Environmental Planning

16. Formulation of broad development concepts and a varying degree of economic planning have become accepted functions of government in practically all countries since the Second World War. In a growing number of cases, health, education, housing and social welfare in general have also become important components of national development policy and programmes.

17. It is generally agreed that social improvement is not an inevitable consequence of economic development. Nevertheless, changes in the social and the physical environment are seldom considered together with the proposed economic changes inherent in resource development. Experience, however, shows that even when the social setting in which a development programme is started and the resulting social changes have been envisaged, the full measure of the expected social and economic gains has failed to materialize unless the necessary changes of the physical environment were also anticipated and planned for at the same time. This is particularly important for the less developed countries where economic and technological resources are scarce.

/

18. To be realistic the proposed goals (in terms of specific projects) of an economic development programme for a given region need to be evaluated in the light of available resources natural, economic, technological and human. They must also be gauged against the anticipated social and cultural requirements at various stages of development. Finally, specific projects must be related to each other within the framework of a physical or environmental plan for an area or community. The direction, pace and consecutive phases of such a plan will necessarily depend on the essential factors affecting development: the known natural resources, the physical conditions of the area, its economic potential, the social acceptance of the proposed changes and, of course, political considerations.

19. It is the task of physical or environmental planning to define in physical terms the different components of a specific development programme, by assessing and recommending within a given area, zones for industrial, agricultural, residential, social and cultural uses and by establishing a rational pattern for transport and communications, for power supply and distribution, and for other utility networks as part of the overall programme. On such basis environmental planning provides an opportunity to reconcile the often divergent interests of material production in its narrow sense with human welfare, and to help establish a better balance in the urban/rural relationship of a developing area. The more rapid the urbanization process becomes, the more necessary it is to plan for it, so that costly mistakes of the past can be avoided.

20. Physical planning thus conceived is part of a many-sided process of economic and social development and its course clearly depends on a variety of development factors. First of all, economic and technological means vary from place to place, as do the natural and human resources available. Furthermore, current plans are based on economic and social activities which have started before a particular intervention and will

/continue long

continue long after the present intervention. Finally, social and political conditions are projecting throughout the planning and development cycle a general and often changing framework within which action is conceived, accepted and executed, and it is therefore not the "physical planner" who usually makes the planning decisions.

21. The discussions on land problems have pointed out the urgent need for converting generalizations into constructive and practical policies, and for reconciling the rights of the individual with the public interest before the full force of industrialization and urbanization has stratified land patterns and made rearranging difficult. The enactment of requisite land legislation, where it does not exist, and its proper application, where it does, is essential to avoid speculation with urban land at the expense of the lower income groups and the recent imigrants in particular.

22. Most participants have stated that "efficient town planning" was an answer to the ill effects of over rapid urbanization. But it has also been stated that current interventions attempting to reduce the rural"urban migration has rarely been accompanied by a conscious effort at community and regional planning. Thus it generally happens that housing, community facilities (educational and health services for instance) and the essential utilities are outstripped by both the growth of population and the pace of urbanization. It has further been noted that where there is central economic planning, there is a greater readiness to consider the social and the physical setting and consequences of economic development. But they are usually considered too late and too little is done about them.

23. Physical planning is a continuing process and it can be suitably done only by an organization including the required expert knowledge and the necessary legislative and financial authority. Its work is of a long term character and the concept of comprehensive planning requires team work as a vehicle. It is therefore more important to establish

/the necessary

the necessary planning organization, to provide it with the required staff which often needs to be trained, and to set out the methods and procedures and secure the funds and legislation - then to draw up a master plan that will not continue to be supported by a planning body. A close relationship between the physical planning organ and the economic and social development units in the government is a primary condition for success.

Comprehensive regional planning and development

24. The economically under-developed countries are sometime considered to be now at a stage of development comparable to that of highly industrialized countries one hundred years ago. The result of the relatively slow economic development in the past has generally been a progressive deterioration of their urban environment. Some of these countries have, even after a century of effort, not yet repaired the damage of a long neglect and millions of human beings belonging to the lower income groups continue to be exposed - as slum dwellers - to the worse physical and social hazards. To accept the view that an equally long period of disorganization and urban squalor is unavoidable would offer a grim future for the developing countries.

25. Without going into the fundamental difference between both the past and the present socio-economic settings in the West and in Asia, one should consider at least two new factors which make it unnecessary to repeat the costly mistakes of the past. One is the fact that present technology offers a wider range of possibilities for the region wide distribution of population and for community structure than was possible in the 19th century. The other is the increasing role of government and public responsibility in the planning and development process.

/26. From the

26. From the development point of view, each community is related to others as regards economic, physical and social factors. Development in one place calls for co-ordination of local projects with regional and national programmes. The region, in fact, is the link between the individual community and the nation. A regional plan permits more easily an identification of national goals in terms of local action. In other words, it offers a suitable framework within which development projects of national, as well as of local, significance can find their proper place. It hererfore also provides an opportunity to mobilize through community development the human resources of an area for economic and social progress at the local level, but within the scope of national development goals.

27. Attempts to achieve integrated economic, social and physical development of the total resources of an area through regional planning afford an approach that may prevent undesirable social effects of urbanization and permit industrialization without the growth of slum areas. Regional planning in the past has been limited primarily to the re-development of metropolitan areas or to river valley development, where hydro-electric energy served as a sources of power. The possibility of introducing nuclear energy in a wide range of geographic locations may expand also the opportunity for careful regional planning of the use of resources that have not been tapped to date for lack of power.

28. The urbanization process in the countries developing at present does not necessarily have to follow the pattern characteristic of the already industrialized countries. Different and more complex

/development

development problems are emerging at the present stage and, correspondingly, society disposes of new and better means to cope with them. The process of urbanization and the urban/rural relationship might therefore probably be tempered and channelled through integrated economic, social and physical planning and the development of the natural, technoligical and human resources. Comprehensive regional planning is thus equally important for the redevelopment of metropolitan areas for the opening up of new resources, and for the reconstruction of rural regions.

29. There is an important aspect of urbanization in relation to physical and regional planning. Not only does the social structure of the village generally cease to dominate and guide the new city immigrant but the traditional social structure of the host city itself also changes under the impact of industrialization and the influx of immigrants. The city, it has been said, is the physical image of economic condition and the social structure and culture of a society. But cities continue to be rebuilt and new towns are being planned without sufficient care for their socio-economic function in the modern industrial society, and the interaction cities and their hinterland. Socio-economic research and conclusive data on the city's role in contemporary society, on its fuction within a region, and on the type of physical environment conducive to a more balanced mix of urban-rural cultures are still lacking.

Lines of future action

30. Against the background of ills and potential remedies the complex of processes and problems of economic and social development must be considered in their totality. Industrialization, urbanization, community development, and regional planning are current problems of theory and practice closely linked together. They may offer some answers to problems related to a more balanced growth of industry and agriculture; to a more desirable urban/rural relationship; and to a better use of the people's own resources, skills and enthusiasm.

31. A number of large new cities are being planned and built in Asia. Integrated (economic, social, technological, cultural, etc.) research into consecutive phases of design, production and actual use could be carried out in these new cities simultaneously in one location, at the drafting board, on the construction sites, and in the new homes, work places and neighbourhoods. Construction and maintenance costs should be lowered as a result of such research and the new communities may become better adjusted socially and gain in cohesion.

32. In addition asian countries provide numerous examples of valley development projects at different stages of planning and execution. These projects offer a unique possibility for regional land use research and formulation of operational policy. The effect of the location of new and existing communities - rural, industrial and residential - in relation to economic, technological and human resources could be admirably observed there. There could also be found the proper balance between the desire to maintain by means of decentralization of development the human scale of small communities and the advantages of metropolitan concentrations in terms of culture, art, education and other amenities, services and facilities.

33. Attempts have been made to establish self-sufficient neighbourhoods in congested urban areas and to restore the now extinct cohesion which was, in the pre-industrial period of development, founded on an apparent balance

/ among

among the social, economic and cultural factors in the urban and rural communities. The physical planner has evolved the concept of the "neighbourhood unit", a residential zone equipped with the required types and capacities of community services and facilities, and related to each other by a rational network of utilities and roads. The social planner has proposed neighbourhood formation on linguistic, ethnic, religious or economic function and also through provision of cultural amenities, including cultural centres. Neither has worked by itself although both methods have tended to improve living conditions where applied. More experience is needed before a conclusive opinion on the merits of these experiments can be formed.

34. Much has been said in recent years about adapting the experience of the highly developed countries to the conditions of the world's less developed areas. In the more industrialized countries public responsibility in the development process came about gradually and largely to remedy conditions of economic recession and social maladjustment. Many developing Asian nations however have highly advanced social legislation but possess only limited economic and technological resources. Also, in these countries public initiative and public planning are taken for granted and they are becoming an integral part of the development process. Out of dire necessity they are now evolving new approaches of their own more suited to their circumstances and needs. Experience thus gathered in the economically less developed countries may well, at this stage, prove to be of the greatest interest and value to all.

Discussion and conclusions

35. The ensuing discussion in which most participants took part brought out a number of points of general interest. The preliminary draft report on Economic Development and Urban Living Conditions - an argument for regional planning, to guide community growth (prepared by Miss Catherine Bauer,

/ lecturer

lecturer in City and Regional Planning at the University of California, for the Housing, Building and Planning Branch, UN) was commended as a real contribution to the understanding of the relationship between the physical environment and sound economic and social development; and of the interaction between individual and group and the social and physical environment. The participants in the Seminar were invited to send their comments to the Housing, Building and Planning Branch (United Nations, New York) at their earliest convenience.

36. The problems of land tenure, land acquisition and the financing of land and utilities development was considered as an important factor conducive to an orderly growth of cities. The discussion further covered the different methods and practices of land use planning, use zoning and building regulations and the role of local and central authorities in the provision of housing and community facilities and services.

37. Several participants have described the policies, the administrative, legislative and financial procedures, and others ways and means relating to planning, both physical and social, at the different levels of government (local, regional and national). The problem of training the required technical and administrative personnel for the different phases of planning and execution of housing and community improvement programmes, were also discussed.

38. The origin and growth of slums; the question of overcrowding and the legal and police measures to prevent it; the remedies to slums and blight, including public subsidies, public finance and social and group work, have been considered by the Seminar. In this connection the question of densities and housing and planning standards was also raised. The role neighbourhoods in the physical and the social sense as a means of integration of the different strata of the urban population into a cohesive community was discussed as well as the possibility of establishing within self-sufficient neighbourhood units "local" industries in order to provide employment opportunity locally without excessive travel time from home to work place.

/ 39. The Seminar

39. The Seminar noted with satisfaction that an Asian conference on regional (physical) planning is to be held in 1957 or 1958. The Seminar felt that the proposed conference should examine: (a) the methods of and trends in physical planning and its place in the total process of economic and social development; (b) the criteria and factors determining the character and the extent of a region for planning and development purposes; and (c) case studies on current position, practices and results of physical planning at the local, regional and national levels. The Seminar futher noted that the case studies will cover examples of redevelopment of metropolitan and other existing urban centres, rural areas where large-scale community development or rural reconstruction projects are being undertaken, and areas where new natural resources are being put to use on large scale. It was further agreed that the participants are prepared to assist the UN Secretariat in the preparation of the conference through correspondence and other suitable arrangements. In this connection the physical and social factors influencing community cohesion and the creation of desirable neighbourhoods require intensive attention and study.

40. The Seminar came to the conclusion that there is a fundamental difference between the socio-economic settings of the 19th century industrial revolution in Europe and the present conscious effort at a more balanced industrial and agricultural development in Asia. The present technology offers a wider range of possibilities for the distribution of population and for the community and regional structure from the physical and social point of view. At the same time the increasing role of public authorities and public responsibility concerning matters of housing and physical environment in particular, are now generally accepted functions of government in Asia. The Seminar felt that bold and imaginative action by the Asian people and their governments combining industrialization and orderly urban growth; agricultural reconstruction and community development; and social and physical planning of the local, regional and national levels could bring about a more desirable urban/rural relationship without the physical hazards and social ills which are the usual symptoms and characteristics of over rapid urbanization.